

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SERVICE

INTERNATIONAL CITY MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION
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THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMON SERVICES

What are common services? What central supervision, review, and control are needed to assure good services for all city departments?

Chief administrators in many cities are giving more attention to the management of common services that are an integral part of all or most municipal activities. For purposes of this report, a "common service" is one which all or most city departments must have in order to do their work properly. It is not necessarily a day-to-day part of the chief administrator's job, but he should see that these services are provided with sufficient attention to serve the needs of city department heads.

Common services often are known as auxiliary or housekeeping services, and in this report include office services (telephone service, mail and messenger service, central files, and so on), control of publications, printing and duplicating, transportation and motor equipment, real and personal property management, and building management. Common services for this report do not include the primary management jobs of planning, personnel, legal services, finance (including budgeting and purchasing), administrative planning and research including work simplification, procedure analysis, procedures manuals, administrative reporting, and administrative regulations.

Criteria for Centralizing Common Services. Some degree of centralization of these common services is essential for avoiding duplication of effort and higher costs. All cities do in fact centralize to some degree one or more of these services. The centralization of common services gives all management officials more time for planning and directing municipal operations. Other advantages of such centralization include better handling of peak loads of work, lower unit costs, higher output, specialized supervision, and general convenience for all city departments.

There is a point of diminishing returns on such centralization if it results in higher unit costs and entails superfluous paper work and observance of ritual that actually slow down the work of other departments. City officials therefore should consider the following criteria in deciding which of the common services can be centralized advantageously: (1) the financial savings if any that can be effected; (2) the increase in efficiency of operations of all departments; (3) availability of trained employees, machines, equipment, and storage space; and (4) the ability of the other departments to adjust to the centralized control.

Three steps are needed after a decision has been made as to which common services can be centralized advantageously. First, the proposals must be sold to the several departments affected; active resistance and actual sabotage can nullify the expected advantages. Second, the plan of operations must be made clear to all department heads. Specifically, they should know the time when the

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change becomes effective, the assignment of responsibilities, the changes in procedures, the forms to be used, and the common sense exceptions that can be made when cases of emergency arise. Third, a period of a few days to a few weeks should be allowed for follow-ups and revisions to be made in procedures on the basis of experience with the new plan.

Organization for Common Services. No rules can be laid down for the centralization of common services within a city government. In a small city the city clerk's office may be responsible for building management, messenger service, and central duplicating. In other cities the public works department, for example, may have charge of the maintenance of buildings, and the purchasing agent may provide printing and duplicating service for all departments. In a large city a department of administrative management or central services may be set up. Whatever the organization, it should be carefully planned and defined as to scope so that the administration of common services will not require the detailed supervision of the chief administrator, and department heads will be freed from a mass of time consuming detail.

An example of a department of central services is that in Long Beach, Calif., which includes three divisions: general services, automotive, and duplicating. The general services division includes custodial and elevator service, operation of the city hall telephone switchboard, inventory control of all city-owned real and personal property including salvage sales, maintenance and repair of office machines except accounting equipment, and operation of a central messenger service. The automotive division operates on a revolving fund financed from rental charges made to other city departments. The division maintains and services passenger cars, motorcycles, street sweepers, heavy construction equipment, and other types of motor equipment for all city departments except fire and water and harbor. The duplicating division also operates on a revolving fund financed from service charges to other departments. Its services include addressing and mailing, printing, and duplicating.

As another example, San Diego, Calif., recently created a general services division in the finance department to handle common services required by various city departments. Tabulating machines, for example, have been brought together in this division to serve all city departments requiring such machines. A central mail room was set up for the handling of outside and inside mail for all departments and an interdepartmental messenger service has been provided. The city print shop which has done only multilithing work was expanded to handle blueprinting and photostat work, and the office supply storeroom was located next to the print shop. The new general services division also provides a stenographic pool to help with peak loads which come at different times in city departments. It is expected that such a pool will greatly reduce the need for part-time workers.

Office Services. The common office services that can be centralized include (1) layout of office space, (2) the control of forms, (3) files, (4) records management, (5) the city hall information center, (6) telephone service, (7) mail and messenger, (8) typing and transcription service, (9) machine tabulating, and (10) maintenance of office machines.

1. Office Layout. Most city halls are overcrowded, and the planning and layout of offices helps to use the space in the most efficient manner. Recent years have seen some notable technical advances in development of office furniture, light movable partitions, office lighting, painting and decorating, and other phases of office environment. In an old building with a number of small rooms,

a gain in space can be made by knocking out some of the permanent partitions to create large open work spaces. Other changes in lighting and office furnishings can be made to accommodate employees as efficiently as possible in a limited space. The layout of office space is discussed in MIS Report No. 102, pp. 671-76.

2. Forms Control. Over a period of years most city departments build up numerous forms and records that often are too cumbersome and expensive to use. These forms often duplicate those used by other departments. The cost of a completed record is many times greater than the cost of the blank form because this includes the cost of preparing, handling, distributing, and filing. In most cities a brief survey will show that many forms can be discarded, and those that are retained can be redesigned so that they will be easier to prepare, file, and use. Centralized control and review of forms will help standardize the forms and cut down the number in use. A good program for forms and records control is described in MIS Report No. 81.

3. Files. Prompt, systematic, and orderly filing and locating of forms, records, and other papers are essential to a well-run office. To do this suitable filing and locating methods must be established, employees trained, and adequate space and equipment provided.

It is not desirable literally to centralize all records of a city government, but central supervision, filing standards, and employee training are needed even in the smallest cities. The city clerk is a logical person to undertake this work in many cities because of the kind of work done in his own office.

The records of the city clerk are the nearest to being "centralized" in most cities. The city clerk in Los Angeles, Calif., established a "centralized finding system" several years ago that covers all city activities requiring official action. The system records communications to the city council, ordinances, resolutions, motions, minutes, contracts, leases, deeds, loyalty oaths, etc. The basis is numeric filing, and adequate cross references are provided on an alphabetic basis. The system relies on continuing and careful assignment of materials from active to inactive files.

San Jose, Calif., has just completed an extensive filing system installation to serve all of the city government. The system uses on a city wide basis standard major headings which are broken down into secondary titles as needed. In some of the smaller departments and divisions of larger departments a simple alphabetic subject breakdown was used where city-wide headings were inapplicable. All files are supported by an alphabetic cross index.

An employee in the city manager's office is responsible for supervising the filing system on a city-wide basis, training file clerks, and making new installations where needed. Each department uses a different color label for its file folders to make it easier to circulate materials between departments. City hall filing will be the subject of a forthcoming MIS report.

4. Records Management. A planned records retention and destruction program, with the possibility of microfilming, is one of the ways to conserve space, equipment, time, and manpower. Some city employee should be responsible for classifying documents for active files, inactive records, and destruction. The job is closely related to forms control and filing and demands continuing attention.

The three major parts of records management are (1) the creation of records in current use, including forms control; (2) the effective handling of records in

current use, including good filing systems; and (3) the selection of records for permanent preservation. A professional archivist, historian, or librarian should be consulted in deciding which records should be preserved permanently. Records management will be the subject of a forthcoming MIS report.

5. City Hall Information Center. Another activity that lends itself to centralized control is the establishment of a special information center in the city hall. A central information office or counter helps to create good public relations and is particularly useful in the large city that has a bewildering variety of city and county offices for many kinds of activities. Such an information center, located in the city hall lobby, can serve two purposes--the handling of routine inquiries and the receipt and follow-up on complaints about specific city services. A description of the special information centers in a number of cities is contained in MIS Report No. 92.

6. Telephone Service. Even the smallest city should not neglect telephone service for city employees. Decisions must be made on who should have phones, which phones should be inter-office, and which phones should be connected to outside lines. The setup of the central switchboard, if any, and the location of individual phones is an important part of the office layout described above.

All city employees who use the telephone in contact with the public need training in telephone usage. This training can be of a brief in-service nature and can include demonstrations and motion picture films. The local telephone company in any city is glad to help in planning the telephone system for municipal buildings, in training employees in telephone usage, and in training switchboard operators.

The importance of telephone service is dramatically illustrated in a 1947 survey of five New York City departments made by the Citizens Budget Commission. The survey group found that the city hall had 14 switchboards and 42 operators where one switchboard and 21 operators could do the work equally well. The potential saving was estimated at \$56,000 per year.

7. Mail and Messenger Service. Some centralization of mail and messenger service is a time saver for all city departments. Centralized mail service cuts down drastically the time involved in purchasing, handling and accounting for stamps, and sealing and stamping of envelopes.

Oakland, Calif., installed a central mailing system in the city hall after a survey showed that 21 departments and offices processed a total of about 1,500 pieces of outgoing mail each day. A postage meter machine, operated by the city hall messenger, seals, stamps, and records the postage used by all offices, and the average daily volume of mail is now processed in 10 minutes. The new system saves about 160 man hours per month in clerical work. Regular and frequent mail collections in city hall offices meet departmental requirements in getting out important letters.

Rochester, New York, also has found it more efficient to establish a central mail room to handle city hall incoming and outgoing mail. All mail originating in the city hall is brought down twice daily to the mail room and is sealed and meter-stamped by machine. The city's annual mailing exceeds 1,000,000 pieces of outgoing mail so that mechanization offers real savings in time and money. The city has found too that it helps to have city employees sort incoming mail because inquiries and other letters are routed to the proper city departments.

8. Typing and Transcription. Even the small cities to a certain extent can pool typing services for several city departments. This pool may be only the part time services of one typist. In larger cities a pool of one or more full time typists can handle peak loads of transcription and typing work in various departments and fill in for the vacation and sick leave of other employees.

Transcription as used here means only the use of dictating machines, not stenography by shorthand or stenotypy. Very few city officials need the services of a stenographer. The need for a stenographer should be determined by the type of dictation (usually technical and policy matters) rather than the rank or title of the employee.

The time lost while one person dictates and the other records is pointed up in the 1947 survey mentioned above that was made in New York City. The survey group found in a sample study of 16 offices, that 76 hours in dictating and shorthand transcription time were used in one week. It was estimated that this time for dictating and transcription could be cut to 18 hours by the use of dictating machines. This example is not intended as criticism of New York; the same situation can be found in many municipal, county, state, and federal agencies.

9. Machine Tabulating. This is probably the only common service discussed in this report that has application only to medium-size and larger cities--cities of 50,000 population or more. As used here machine tabulating means the various methods of transferring raw data by machine to punched cards. These punched cards comprise the basis for many kinds of machine tabulations involving sorting, collating, arithmetic computations, and listings.

Spectacular savings can be achieved by machine tabulating, and the advantages are too well known to require elaboration. Except in the very largest cities, however, some centralization of machine tabulating on a city wide or departmental basis is needed to avoid excessive cost.

The principal limitations on effective use of machine tabulating are these: (1) there must be a sufficient volume of records to warrant the cost of machines and operators, or the cost of a commercial service bureau; (2) the work in forms control, filing, and records management discussed above must precede machine tabulating to get accurate and current reports for management information and control; and (3) records must be sufficiently standardized and repetitive to permit machine tabulation.

Machine tabulating has many applications for municipal government. The most common is for financial records including general and cost accounting, payrolls, inventory records, and assessment and property tax records. In addition machine tabulating has been adapted for personnel records, vital statistics, welfare records, public school statistics, voter registrations, and public works and public utilities records.

Cities of less than 100,000 population that use machine tabulating for one or more of the above purposes include Stockton, Calif., Covington, Ky., Traverse City, Mich., Columbus and Jackson, Miss., Poughkeepsie, N. Y., Winston-Salem, N. C., Cranston, R. I., and Portsmouth, Va.

10. Maintenance of Office Machines. In the larger cities it is logical to have one or more full-time employees assigned to the servicing, maintenance, and repair of typewriters, adding machines, calculating machines, transcribing and

dictating machines, and other office equipment. Regular inspection and preventive maintenance of this equipment will prevent overhauls and expensive repairs. Where there is not enough work of this kind to keep an employee busy, the city can sign service contracts with representatives of most office machine manufacturers to provide for regular inspection, maintenance, and repair.

Control of City Publications. Every city should have an over-all program for the coordination, review, and approval of reports and other written materials issued for administrative use and for the public in order to achieve economy in printing and distribution and to avoid unnecessary publication expense. One of the first steps is to set up a central file and record of all city publications. It may be desirable in some cities to set up a publications control committee which would study the problem of general city publications such as annual reports, manuals, codes, and other publications. Provision would be made for adequate editing and review before public release of any publications. The committee also could establish standards as to binding, size, and design of such reports and for reviewing any proposed publications for public release submitted by various city departments.

In Long Beach, Calif., the publications committee consists of the finance director, director of central services, the administrative assistant to the city manager, and, the city librarian. In addition to these members the department head concerned with the particular publication being reviewed also acts as a committee member. This committee drafted a proposed regulation to be issued by the city manager establishing regular procedures for the review of all publications and setting forth the general standards to be followed concerning size and type of binding and sale policy. A loan copy of this administrative regulation is available on request to MIS.

Printing and Duplicating. Even small cities use a large variety of forms and issue reports, instructions, and other materials which must be printed or duplicated. In some cities this work has been centralized in one agency. In general, centralized operation of printing and duplicating has saved time and money over the alternative methods of having individual departments do this work or having it done outside in commercial print shops. Actually few except the very largest cities can use letter-press printing advantageously because of the extremely high cost involved in purchase of typesetting machines, presses, and other printing equipment. Low-cost methods of reproducing reports, leaflets, records, and other forms are available, however, through several duplicating methods. Careful planning will show what equipment can pay its own way, and the more expensive and complicated jobs can be done by outside private contract.

A central duplicating system offers a number of advantages including lower costs of reproduction with almost printlike quality of work and the possibility of better control of records, forms, and other materials. A duplicating service can handle rush jobs (a service that many commercial printers cannot guarantee), and it saves the trouble of soliciting bids on small and routine jobs. The central duplicating services of several cities are described in the June, 1949, issue of Public Management, pages 171-74; duplicating processes are described in some detail in MIS Report No. 66.

Transportation and Equipment. A central municipal garage has advantages even in the smallest cities where work is limited to routine maintenance and minor repairs. A central garage may have complete control of all or some equipment or may simply provide repair and maintenance for automobiles remaining under departmental

control. The services of storage, recordkeeping, and routine maintenance usually can be handled to advantage by a central garage. Other garage services can be added if the motor vehicle fleet is large enough to warrant full-time mechanics, automotive electricians, painters, car washers, and other workers.

Complete central management of city auto equipment would include a car pool to provide transportation for city employees who do not need vehicles on a full time basis. Car pools represent a compromise between providing individual cars for employees who seldom use them and requiring employees to furnish their own cars or to use public transportation. A car pool is generally advantageous when there is a large number of employees in one location, many of whom use cars occasionally. A detailed discussion of central municipal garages in several cities is contained in the October, 1949, issue of Public Management, page 269-72; the management of central municipal garages is discussed in MIS Report No. 64.

Property Management. The investment in public property represents a large municipal expenditure, and inventory control of city-owned real and personal property is not only a fiscal control but also a positive aid to management. A current inventory of city-owned property is essential, not only from the standpoint of accounting for physical assets but also as an aid in meeting the requirements of various city departments, as an aid in preventing loss or theft, in establishing proof of loss in case of fire or other destruction, and in the case of land in providing accurate information for the municipal planning agency. The city should maintain an inventory of city-owned real and personal property, and MIS Report No. 73 describes the organization and procedures for such inventory control.

Building Management. This is another activity which lends itself to some degree of centralization. As a service common to all departments it too often becomes the responsibility of no department. Building management is dependent upon effective organization and planning, work standards and schedules, and such related activities as grounds maintenance, fire prevention, and police or watchman protection. Preventive maintenance of buildings and equipment is an important part of building management and is inherent in good organization, planning, and work standards and schedules.

The chief administrator should not have to spend much time on this work, but there should be one department head or other employee responsible for assigning space in accordance with need and availability, supervising the cleaning and maintenance of offices, managing building services, and planning and supervising major maintenance and repair, whether done by the city departments or by outside private contract. The management of municipal buildings is discussed in MIS Report No. 103.

Conclusion. This report has emphasized the common services which affect almost every city and which are too often overlooked by the chief administrator. These services taken together add up to quite an impressive proportion of municipal expenditures and are worthy of the same careful planning and supervision as other municipal activities. Some degree of central supervision by the chief administrator over these common services is essential to avoid duplication of effort and higher costs.

It should be emphasized that while these services apply to cities of all sizes there is no intent to prescribe any ideal form of organization. The actual allocation of these activities will depend on common sense circumstances in each city. The essential point is that some recognition be given these services by the chief administrator and that some provision be made for central supervision, review, and control.

